

Lura of the Northland

A Springtime Romance
of the Big Outdoors

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Separated from his friend, Lawrence Salter, and active golden, Merton Boyd finds himself lost in the wilderness on his way back from a trip into the Hudson Bay country. He is half-starved and nearly worn out after his wanderings of two days when he catches a trail along which comes a girl carrying a pack, followed by an Indian with a canoe on his back. Though her skin is tanned the girl speaks excellent English and her beauty shows no trace of Indian blood. She says nothing about herself except to mention that she is seventy miles from home. Early the following morning Merton starts off in the canoe with the girl and the Indian. They stop for the midday meal, and just as they are about to resume their journey Merton drops an envelope upon which the name of the Hudson Bay Company is printed. This envelope arouses the girl's suspicion, and she leaves Merton stranded. After further hardship he comes upon two woodsmen with a canoe near a place where whiskey casks have been left. These men, too, are suspicious, but after abandoning their return and take him into their canoe. He fears he is in the power of these whiskey peddlers. The canoe lands on the opposite shore of the lake near a house in which Merton meets a middle-aged man, Adam Herson, who claims to be the father of Lura, the girl who has left the wanderer to die. Herson tells the stranger that he is practically a prisoner under his own roof and that he may stay in the house for a few days before he is released. Early in the morning Merton, Lura, the two woodsmen, Charles and Andrew Boulier, and the Indian start on another journey with loaded canoes. Merton and McGirr are in the second canoe, which, shooting the rapids, is upset. Merton is rescued by Lura, and later the girl explains the whole story of her life. The next day Merton is again sent out with McGirr after Lura has warned him to be constantly on his guard. This time the rapids are passed in safety, but after Merton has taken up his pack on shore he turns to see the canoe speeding downstream.

CHAPTER VI.

(Continued.)

The Reversion.

WITH a twist of his neck Merton dropped the pack to the ground. As it struck there was a harsh, grating rattle. Merton pulled out his pocket knife and bent down quickly. One slit in the bag and his suspicions were confirmed. The sack contained only large, round stones wrapped in pieces of burlap.

Instantly McGirr's plan became clear. He would run the rapids, pick up the two packs of ammunition that had been carried across, and before Merton had carried his second burden to the lower end of the portage would be on his way. Again he would be stranded, now with the river between him and the two posts. It was the trick of which Lura had warned him, for which he had watched until he believed that nothing would happen.

The trail to the river below the rapids was shorter than the stream itself, but a man in a canoe could make the longer journey in much less time than another, with a heavy pack, could walk across. Merton realized this as quickly as he saw the entire plot of the woodsman, and he turned and ran up the trail.

Over a ridge, down across a swamp and then up a slight rise before dipping again to the river bank, the portage led. It was less than a quarter of a mile, and Merton covered it quickly.

Panting, he topped the rise and saw the boxes of ammunition. He had beaten McGirr. Slowly he walked down the incline toward the river, and as he walked the first wave of violent passion he had ever known swept over him. For a moment he trembled before the fury of it. His knees became weak, his hands clenched, his eyes closed to slits, and through the slits he saw, not the trail and the river, but only the face of the young woodsman.

And in his mind there was only one thought. To strike and rend, to tear and crush that sneering face would be the sweetest pleasure for which he had ever striven. Vaguely Merton wondered at this strange desire that gripped him. Never in his life had he known such thoughts, such desires. Never had the well-arranged existence of the past given cause for such emotions.

And as hatred for this man gripped him until he gasped, until the blood pounded against his temples, he was glad that it was so. He felt a joy in his anger that he had never known before, and when the storm had passed it left him, not weak and shaking, but steady, firm, resolved to do what he wished to do. Fear never came to him, fear of what McGirr might do, what pain he might inflict. Only with the recession of the first turbulent wave came caution, and he dropped quickly behind a spruce sapling not ten feet from the river bank.

Immediately the canoe, impelled from the chute by the power of the current, stopped in the centre of the whirlpool, turned and drew in to the shore, and McGirr was out and lifting the first pack into the canoe.

To Merton, as he charged, there seemed nothing new in the scene. He was the primeval man. The roaring river on one side, the hill rising from the flat space at the end of the portage, the limitless forest surrounding everything—it was all old, natural, commonplace. The city, all that it had taught, all that had been impressed upon him, were gone.

It was not a beautiful fight. A lynx and a wolf fight as did these men. Tearing, striking, inflicting pain but never feeling it; gasping with exertion, grunting from the shock of body meeting body, each seeking with tense fingers for a grip of the throat, searching with eager thumbs for the soft, yielding cavities which hold the eyes; lifting the knees

in quick, powerful blows, clinging with arms and legs and with teeth bared for the coveted opportunity, they swayed and rolled and staggered back and forth at the foot of the hill.

Twice McGirr went down in the shock of collision, and once Merton, caught in the huge arms of his adversary, felt the breath and the strength leave his body. Only a powerful thrust with his knee in the pit of McGirr's stomach released him and gave him the opportunity for a wild, vicious swing of the right fist which caught the woodsman on the jaw and sent him sprawling backward.

Instantly Merton was upon him. With his fingers he grasped the other's hair and, his whole strength in the effort, he lifted the matted head and battered the face again and again on the frozen ground. Nor did he stop until the last struggle of the body between his knees had ceased, until the head which he gripped flopped back and forth without the stiffening of a muscle to resist his efforts.

Merton jumped to his feet. Head up, eyes bright, his chest heaving above his laboring lungs, the perspiration glistening in his eyes and a bruise on his side beginning to tingle, he looked round.

The river roared and Merton heard it as the applause of the wilderness, as a welcome to its inner shrine. The sun smiled upon him, the tips of the spruces waved a greeting. He was home.

He turned and rolled McGirr over with a thrust of his foot. The man's face, white beneath the blood, would have been shocking an hour before. Now it was only a proof of Merton's own fitness.

Still smiling, he turned away. First he loaded the canoe. Then, with his hat, he carried water to his foe and threw it upon the upturned face. After the third hateful body twisted, the arms moved, the eyes opened.

"Get up!" commanded Merton sharply.

There was no movement, and he prodded McGirr in the ribs.

"Get up and into that canoe," he ordered.

McGirr, frightened, attempted to rise, only to fall backward with a moan. Merton reached down and grasped the man's collar. Then, un mindful of the rocks and rough ground, he dragged him to the canoe and dropped him into the bow.

"Lie there," he said, as he turned and picked up his paddle.

Then, a smile still on his lips, a wild, new joy swelling within him, he pushed off and went dashing on down the swift water, out of the river and on to the lake.

CHAPTER VII.

Gaining Ground.

IT was midnight when Merton, weary, aching, gave a last proud thrust of his paddle and felt the canoe grate on the sand before the headquarters of the strange band which held him virtually a prisoner. For hours and hours he had been propelling the heavily loaded freight canoe with the burden which Herson found so important.

McGirr still lay in the bow. Three times Merton had aroused him to inquire the way in the darkness. Once he had thought he would compel the woodsman to paddle, as he had been compelled to paddle. But the joy of single accomplishment came to him, and he paddled on, oblivious of the groans that sometimes issued from the bow.

"Hullo!" cried Merton exultantly when the canoe stopped.

In a moment lights appeared in two of the buildings. Merton straightened his cramped legs and stepped ashore as he heard doors opened.

"Get out!" he commanded as he stood over McGirr. "Crawl up to your kennel."

Then, still with the exultation of his double achievement upon him, he began to unload the ammunition.

"That you, Charley?" he heard Herson cry from the top of the bank.

"McGirr's here," answered Merton. "He needs a little help."

"What's the matter?" demanded the leader as he ran down to the canoe.

Two other figures followed, and Merton recognized Lochrie and Lura. He continued to unload the canoe.

"What's the matter?" repeated Herson, peering at McGirr in the darkness as the young canoe man staggered to his feet and began to climb the bank.

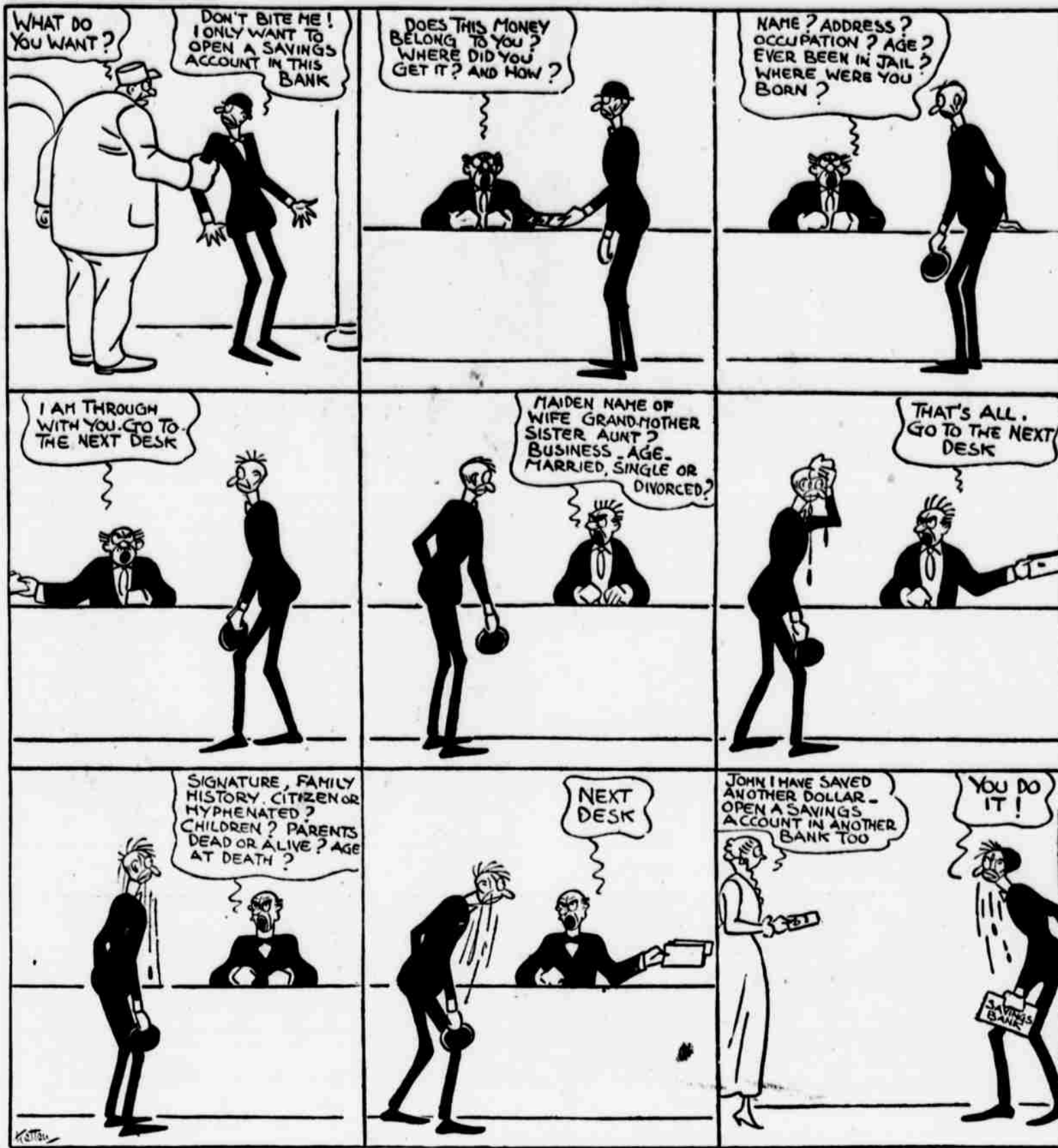
Merton ceased working and waited for the answer. In his new pride he did not care what McGirr said, what Herson would think of this attack upon one of his men. Merton had won a fair fight, had won it decisively, and he could fight again. If Herson had instructed McGirr to leave him on the portage, he could deal with Herson as he had dealt with the other. He would not be bullied, humiliated, longer.

And then McGirr spoke.

"I fell off that steep rock on the chute portage," he mumbled as he went on up the bank. "Foot slipped, and the tump-line caught around my neck."

Can You Beat It?

By Maurice Ketten



"But you're badly hurt, man!" cried Herson as he supported McGirr with an arm under his shoulders.

"And you brought this canoe from the river?" asked Lura, who had walked on past the others to where Merton stood.

"Yes," he answered as he recovered from his amazement. "He couldn't paddle."

"You paddled alone?" demanded Herson.

"Yes. There was no one else, with him in that shape."

"Give me a hand with Charley, here, Jim," Herson said to Lochrie. "Boyd, you come on up. We'll tend to the load later. You've had a hard night."

"Slowly, for McGirr was weak, the little group went on up to the cook camp. Mrs. Lochrie, earnestly solicitous, was ready. With the natural intuition of the nurse she had started a fire and laid out cloth for bandages.

Herson and Lochrie helping, she bathed McGirr's face and tore a bandage for a cut on his forehead. Lura, after one look at the injured man in the light, turned to Merton with a curious expression. Merton felt that she suspected something, but he was entirely unprepared for her question.

"What did he try to do?"

"Nothing," he answered lamely.

"Nonsense," she whispered. "He didn't get that face in a fall. Tell me."

Merton saw that she was not to be deceived.

"He tried to leave me at that portage on the river."

"And Charley is a hard man," was her comment as she turned away to the others, but not before Merton had caught a quick glance of admiration.

"You did well, Boyd," said Herson, when McGirr had been attended to.

"That was an important load, and I appreciate your getting it through. Sit down, and there'll be something for you to eat presently."

Lura never again referred to the fight, nor did Merton believe she spoke of it to her father. McGirr remained at headquarters for two days, sulen, silent. Then, after a high wind which broke up what ice had formed in bays and narrows, he suddenly departed alone for "One Post."

The others settled down to the annual imprisonment which comes with general freezing.

The morning after his fight with McGirr, Merton was again sent to the woods. Day after day he chopped, gaining more proficiency with the ax and an accompanying pride and pleasure in its use. For the first time in his life he was coming to him through his muscles. Tennis, golf, even polo, became prosaic beside this game of fighting the wilderness.

Twice he was sent on short trips by canoe with Lochrie. Once he went with Ne-bau-be-nis to pack in the meat of a caribou the Indian had killed. Another day he and Lura spent long hours hunting partridge.

But he found that something was becoming greater than the mystery. It was his admiration for these people. Although they told him nothing, he began to sense something of the heroic in Herson, and each day he

found himself liking the man more, admiring him more. His first idea of the leader vanished, and his first resentment became less and less.

The man was stern, inexorable, at times, but he always gave an impression of absolute sincerity, and, back of it all, Merton sensed a cause. What it was, what it possibly could be in such a place, he could not even imagine.

Neither could he believe that Herson or his daughter were connected with any criminal enterprise. He firmly believed them incapable of it, and yet, when he tried to analyze this faith in them, he found nothing to support it, while always there was the picture of McGirr and Boulier and the whiskey.

Merton no longer felt any resentment because of Lura's actions when he first saw her. Now he only wondered what cause could be so great, so compelling that this girl could harden her heart and assume the role of both judge and executioner. Surely a great faith, a great purpose, must be the underlying cause of the strange acts of these stranger people.

There was no effort to hide anything from Merton, but what he saw in no way cleared up the mystery. The headquarters were evidently only a fur trading post. "One Post" was only an auxiliary. He saw the store with its goods, heard Lochrie and Herson discuss the Indians and the chances for a big harvest of fur, heard Mrs. Lochrie and Lura talk of the coming of the Indian families in the early summer and the arrival of the men alone at Christmas with the early season's catch. In none of this was there anything mysterious.

In the mean time winter had come to the north country. For a month there had been no visitors to the headquarters post. Merton continued to cut firewood, and when the snow came Lochrie, with a team of dogs, began to haul it. At last all the lakes were solidly frozen over, even the great lakes which, before the headquarters, were the highways.

Herson had been waiting impatiently for the beginning of winter travel, and as soon as he was satisfied that the ice was firm he departed with Ne-bau-be-nis for still another post further to the east.

It was the third day after the departure of Herson that the first Indian arrived at the headquarters post. Lura, who was in charge in the absence of her father, stood in the open door of the store as he came up the bank from the ice. Merton was passing on his way to the woods.

With the first Indian, began to break in her dog team. Six great huskies, fierce when others were near, obeyed her implicitly, and she drove continuously.

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If a beautiful opera singer were in love with you, if you had all the funds of a bank at your disposal, if the President of a republic were your chum—You might or might not let yourself get into such a mess as did the hero of

A Man of Mark

BY ANTHONY HOPE

Next Week's Complete Novel in
The Evening World

It is a story that will set your heart to beating faster; and it is by the man who wrote "The Prisoner of Zenda."

tionately. "There's few men would venture out on that lake a day like this. Run out and take the dogs so she can come in right away."

Merton got his cap and mittens and went out into the storm. The show had been so thick he could see only a little way on the ice, and before he got the door open the dogs were climbing the bank.

As he lifted his head against the blast that eddied around the corner of the building he cried out in his astonishment, and then abouted again in a sudden, overpowering fear.

"Mrs. Lochrie!" he cried. "McGirr! Come here!"

The door was thrown open behind him just as the dogs, their coats full of snow, the white breath being snatched from their nostrils and torn away in the wind, stopped before the building.

Behind them the carole, with its rawhide laced sides and back, stood empty. The team had come out of the storm, but Lura had not come with it.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Storm.

FOR the second time since he had entered the wilderness Merton was in the grip of a new emotion. As the blind, all-dominating fury aroused by the treachery of McGirr had taken him out of himself, wiped out memories of inherited training, stripped him of all the refining draperies of civilization and left him a primitive animal, so this new emotion lifted him out of himself.

But while the first had driven him to an access of action, this seared the strength of the body and mind. He fell back against the building. His left hand was stretched out toward the empty carole, and his right feebly rubbed his eyes, as though with better vision he might right might. What are you going to do?

Go after her?

This time McGirr did not conceal his contempt or hatred for the other. Herson cabin, in converse with her of the strange things of the outer world, it was an undreamed of thing. As it all flashed through his groping mind he saw that it had been from the first, that it was at the bottom of his fight with McGirr, that it was the unseen cause of his continuing at work without thought of effort to escape and reach the railroad.

And now, with the realization of what she meant to him, the girl was gone. Somewhere out in the blizzard she was, perhaps even then made lifeless by the cold, her body covered by the fast-forming drifts, perhaps wandering aimlessly, her strength gone, the end slowly approaching in the driving, whirling snow.

A sob rose in his throat, only to be checked as the muscles of his jaws suddenly tightened. He wheeled about to the two who stood staring from the doorway, and for the second time since he had entered the wilderness Merton was transformed.

This time he did not revert to the primitive. Unknown to him, there was some ancestor, back before the softening days, whose spirit had survived, who now claimed his own. His possession was complete, even to the voice of the young man.

"Come on, let's start," snapped Merton as McGirr looked apathetically at the dogs.

"Start where?"

"To find her, man! Hurry and get ready!"

McGirr did not move. He looked out at the storm sweeping across the lake. A blast turned turtle over a roof and crashed into the door with a blinding, stinging volley of icy particles. Mrs. Lochrie, hardened to a life in the northland, retreated before it. McGirr followed her.

"Do you mean you are not going to find her?" cried Merton as he dashed after them.

"What's the use?" replied McGirr. "You couldn't find anything in that," waving his hand toward the door.

"Do you mean you won't even try?"

Merton's tone was low, but it carried a threat more sinister than the roar with which he had charged McGirr that day on the portage. McGirr looked up sullenly.

"A man couldn't live on that lake," interposed Mrs. Lochrie. "He could never cross it."

"The dogs did," replied Merton sharply. "We can with our backs to it."

"And what would you do when you got across?" demanded McGirr. "Where would you look for her? We don't even know here she went."

"At least we would try," snapped Merton.

"Lura went to see a sick squaw on

Canoe River," offered Mrs. Lochrie. "I heard Jimmy say the tepee was about three miles from the mouth. That makes about fifteen miles from here."

"Do you know where that is, McGirr?" asked Merton.

"Of course. Straight across the lake, ten miles of it. There's no chance."

Merton had been possessed by an uncontrollable fury when he had attacked McGirr on the portage. Now his anger was even greater, but it was in complete control. Then he had forgotten that he had ever taken boxing lessons, although he had boxed a great deal from pure love of the exercise. In the present contest a thread of the science he had acquired remained to aid him.

Now he was cool, and equally as fearless, and his mind, working quickly, grasped everything. McGirr, he saw, was afraid to make the journey, was afraid of the storm. And in the mean time Lura was somewhere out on the ice, stumbling along to a death as certain as the setting of the sun.

"Is there a trail to the Indian's tepee?" asked Merton.

"There are no trails to-day," replied McGirr, with a sullen laugh, "going to the stove."

"How do you find the mouth of Canoe River?"

"Hit straight across the lake until you strike the Dosen Islands. From them the south shore is only four miles. The Canoe empties into this lake in a deep bay straight on south."

"Then if a man travelled straight south from here he would strike the bay and the mouth of the river?"

"Not to-day, in this storm."

"And he would find Lura somewhere between here and the tepee if he kept his directions?" continued Merton evenly, disregarding the sneering tone of McGirr's last reply.

"If she didn't leave the trail, he might. What are you going to do? Go after her?"

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